

# SPEECH OF REV. HENRY SLICER,

*Delivered in the General Conference at Indianapolis, 28th May, 1856, on the subject of the proposed change in the Methodist Discipline, making Non-Slavery holding a Test or Condition of Membership in said Church.*

I am aware, Mr. President, said Mr. S., that this Conference is not in a state of mind or feeling to listen to any protracted remarks.

The Conference which I have the honor, in part, to represent, is represented here by fifteen delegates, and has a membership of 75,000, white and colored. The peculiar position which we occupy, the weight of the body to which we belong, the largeness of our colored membership, each and all combined, furnish reasons why we should be fully heard on this vexed and perplexing question.

Need I say, sir, that we are not pro-slavery? Need I say that we publicly avow our adherence to the authorized standard found in our Discipline? We are not here to ask for changes. We are not here to promote agitation, but to ally strife, and to stand firmly upon the platform of the Discipline as it is.

This debate has taken a wide range, and a little of almost everything has been brought into this discussion. We have had "idolatry," "political organizations," "polygamy," (indeed, sir, there has appeared a remarkable proclivity of mind in that direction.) We have had the "stiletto in the bosom of free Kansas," and "the skeleton, bloody hand of Slavery shaken over the North, and making an impression upon the whole country, and moving the popular heart until it heaves as the billows of the ocean"—and we have been called upon to rally, for the purpose of "wiping out this foul blot," and removing "this sum of all villainies" from the nation.

The Bible has been quoted from Genesis almost to the Apocalypse, and I despair, Mr. President, of being able to follow the speakers in all their wanderings from the subject under discussion.

I desire, Mr. President, to call the attention of this General Conference to two general propositions:

First, That we have no right to do, under existing circumstances, what is proposed to be done. And secondly, That to do it, would be of most mischievous and destructive tendency. And further I wish to say, that whatever has been done, in this or any other country, heretofore, in regard to the efficient management of this delicate question, has been done not by rash, precipitate, or destructive efforts.

I wish, sir, to enter a short caveat against this proposed measure, and I hope if brethren will not hear for the sake of the white men on our border, they will at least for the love they bear to the colored man, listen to what we may have to say.

Whenever the Church or country manifests a disposition to trifle with organic law, good ground is furnished for suspicion and alarm; and if we are prepared to go against the judgment of the wisest and best men of the Church in all time past—and against the powerful argument read upon this floor to-day—and also against the judgment of

the Bishops, who have expressed the opinion that we have not the constitutional vote required to make such a change—we shall do incalculable mischief throughout our whole connection.

Once let the principle be adopted that a bare majority vote, can set aside the constitution by riding down its restrictions, and in 1860, our people may bid farewell to the Restrictive Rules, on page 33 of our Discipline, by which even the rights of a minority are guarded from invasion.

The wise men who framed our civil government, and constituted it a government of limited powers, guarded with jealous care the rights of minorities, and of the smaller States, by giving them an equal representation in the United States Senate, so as to make little Delaware equal to the great State of New York in the number of their Senators. And following this example, the fathers of our Church not only placed these restrictions upon the power of the General Conference, but also gave to each Annual Conference, however small, the right to have two delegates upon this floor.

Let a bare majority rule, and we may, in 1860, if that majority shall please, have an "Itinerant General Superintendency," superseded by a Diocesan Episcopacy, and our wide-spread field of labor parceled out into many separate jurisdictions—for we have been told upon the floor of the present General Conference that "we are tired of being bound up, or tied down by constitutional restrictions."

Let a majority suffice to lay aside the restrictions of our Discipline, and when that majority shall find it convenient they may deprive our ministers and members of the right of trial by committee, and an appeal. And by the same process the General Conference may squander the capital and proceeds of the Book Concern upon objects foreign to those for which it was established.

Let a bare majority to-day override the restriction, and virtually make a new term or condition of membership in our church, as is proposed by the Majority Report now before this Conference—thus setting aside the organic law of the Church—and you will shake the confidence of our whole people, and spread consternation and alarm through all our borders. For when our people discover that you have done by indirection, what you were not allowed to do directly, upon the subject of Slavery, they will expect whenever under the pressure of popular clamor produced by any other cause, you may find it convenient to do so, that your Constitution will be torn to shreds and their dearest rights trampled in the dust.

It is alleged in this debate, that while the General Rule, "forbids the buying and selling" of slaves, that it therefore forbids the hold-

ing or ownership of slaves.

It is a wise maxim of civil law, that the law is to be interpreted by the framers of the law, and by the practice under the law immediately succeeding its enactment. This is a fair principle of construction, or method of interpretation—and to show that this principle has been recognised by the highest judicial authority of this country, I beg leave to call the attention of the Conference to Cranch's Reports, vol. 1, page 97. In the case of (Stewart vs. Leard) Mr. Chief Justice Marshall had tried this cause in the court below—the judgment was affirmed—and Mr. Justice Patterson, in delivering the opinion of the Supreme Court, said:

"To this objection, which is of recent date, it is sufficient to observe that practice and acquiescence under it (the law) for a period of several years, commencing with the organization of the judicial system, afford an irresistible answer, and have indeed fixed the construction. It is a contemporary interpretation of the most forcible nature. This practical exposition is too strong and obstinate to be shaken or controlled. Of course, the question is at rest, and ought not now to be disturbed."

The General Rule of the Discipline on Slavery is to be subjected to this rule of construction—"the practice and acquiescence" under it, when the administration was in the hands of those venerable men who framed the Rule.

The first notice which we have of the General Rule on Slavery is in 1789—for it will be borne in mind, that it was not one of Mr. Wesley's original Rules.) And when we look at the contemporaneous practice of the fathers, this practice is found to settle the matter unquestionably and undeniably, that the rule on Slavery was not intended to apply to simple slaveholding, but to the buying and selling of slaves.

Even when previously, at the Christmas Conference of 1784, they adopted the Rule (which they found it necessary immediately to suspend,) even then, in a N. B. they said that the Rule of gradual emancipation, which they had then adopted, "should affect the members of our society no farther than as they are consistent with laws of the State in which they reside." Our fathers always advised the use of "wise and prudent means," in dealing with this subject.

I now turn my attention to my friend, Dr. Thompson, and make a short answer to his remarks upon Slavery as it existed in the days of Abraham, and the Hebrews. I should have been better pleased with the Doctor if, after telling us that Abraham had servants, "born in his house and bought with his money," he had not undertaken to prove in the face of the passage, that what was bought with Abraham's money was not property, and that those servants were not slaves.—The reasoning of the Doctor in this case is not such as I had expected from him, knowing as I do his intelligence and learning. He concludes, as I think, illogically, that because, as he says, "when Abraham armed three hundred of his household ser-

vants, they were not held as property," and he said that he could convince all that Abraham armed his slaves three hundred strong, and marched them into a hostile territory, and then marched them back." "In the name of common sense," said he, "how could he have found his way back a slaveholder? Suppose he had had slaves such as the southern slaveholders have, could he have done this?"

Now, Mr. President, this reasoning strikes me as being peculiar. If, when Abraham went out to rescue his nephew Lot from the confederate kings, his three hundred slaves found themselves in the midst of "a hostile territory," that of itself would furnish a good reason why they should not turn "fugitives" among hostile pagans by forsaking a kind and devotedly pious master. I should conclude that the strong sympathy and affection which existed between "the father of the faithful," "the friend of God," and his armed slaves, which induced the latter to peril their lives in the rescue of their masters' relative, would furnish a much better reason why they did not abscond among hostile strangers than the one given by my learned friend.

Again, sir, it has been no uncommon thing for slaves to accompany their masters to the battle-field, and to return from the dangers and toils of war to their quiet and comfortable homes—it was so with our Washington and his slaves, in the first war of Independence, and also with the hero of New Orleans and his slaves in the second war of Independence.

The Dr. next alluded to the Slavery among the Hebrews, and spoke of the prohibition to surrender fugitives. We were not informed, as we should have been, that while the Hebrews were not allowed to enslave Hebrews, they were allowed to make slaves of the heathen—and while the sabbatic (or seventh) year was a year of release to the Hebrew servant, that arrangement did not extend to the pagan slaves. I refer for the law to Leviticus xxv, 44, 45, where you will observe that, while the Hebrew servant is bought for six years, the heathen is called a "bondsmen," and a "possession," and an "inheritance."

In regard to the fugitive slave law of the Hebrew, the Dr. has remarked that, "if a fugitive slave came into the country, the commonwealth was pledged to prevent his being recaptured."

I do not perceive the bearing or reference of this matter to the subject before the Conference, but if you will indulge me, I will ask your attention while I read a passage from that great biblical scholar, Moses Stuart, of Massachusetts, whose authority ought to be good on such a question.

I quote from "Bledsoe's Liberty and Slavery," page 155:

"The first inquiry of course is," says this learned divine, "in regard to those very words where does his master live? among the Hebrews, or among foreigners? The language of the passage fully develops this, and answers the question. He has escaped

from his master unto the Hebrews: (the text says *thee*, i. o. Israel:) he shall dwell with thee even among you—in one of thy gates." Of course, then, he is an *immigrant*, and did not dwell among them, before his flight. If he had been a Hebrew servant, belonging to a Hebrew, the whole face of the thing would be changed. Restoration, or restitution, if we may judge by the tenor of other property-laws among the Hebrews, would have surely been enjoined. But, be that as it may, the language of the text puts it beyond a doubt that the servant is a *foreigner*, and has fled from a *heathen master*. This entirely changes the complexion of the case. The Hebrews were God's chosen people, and were the only nation on earth which worshipped the only living and true God. In case a slave escaped from them, (the heathen,) and came to the Hebrews, two things were to be taken into consideration, according to the view of the Jewish legislation. The first was that the treatment of slave among the heathen was far more severe and rigorous than it could lawfully be under the Mosaic law. The heathen master possessed the power of life and death, of scourging and imprisoning, or putting to excessive toil, even to any extent that he pleased. Not so among the Hebrews. Humanity pleaded there for the protection of the fugitive. The second and most important consideration was, that only among the Hebrews could the fugitive slave come to the knowledge and worship of the only living and true God."

And I need only add, Mr. President, that it is not very likely that there existed between the Hebrews and the heathen nations surrounding them, any solemn engagements, such as "constitutional obligations," to deliver up "fugitives from labor."

I regret that Dr. T. has thought proper, in allusion to the case of Onesimus, the fugitive slave of Philemon, converted at Rome by the ministry of St. Paul, to make such exceptionable reference to the authorities of the Government of the United States. He asks "Do you believe that Onesimus was a slave? If so, how did the Apostle get him back? If Paul had been a United States District Judge, with Marshals at his back, and secret service money at his command, he might get him back."

I do not presume to enter into the discussion of the meaning of the Greek term (*Doulos*), which has so much occupied the Drs. of Divinity, Professors in Colleges, and the church papers of late. I will only say, that, as far as I know, the concurrent testimony of Commentators and Lexicographers, from McKnight, Donnegan, and Dr. Robinson down, has interpreted it to mean a *bondsman*, the opposite of *freeman*. There never was, so far as I know, an effort to construe it otherwise, until it was necessary to serve a purpose. You were told by my learned friend that Onesimus was a "run-away apprentice." The same kind of interpretation might construe the language of St. Paul, in Gal. iv. 22. "For it is written, that Abraham had two sons, the one by a

bondmaid, the other by a free woman." Thus, according to such a rendering, "Abraham had two sons, the one by a free woman, the other by a hired girl." St. Peter has said that "the *unlearned and unstable wrest the Scriptures*;" but it was reserved for modern times to present the learned D. D.'s wrestling plain Scriptures, the meaning of which the common sense of mankind had settled centuries ago. But, sir, a truce to this reference to the Scriptures, which I should not have made, but for the purpose of following those who went before me in this debate.

A great deal, Mr. President, has been said here which, if reported upon our border, must do incalculable mischief. We have had such predictions of evil—such an arraignment of Bishop Asbury and the Fathers—such representations of Slavery—making it out to be worse than Idolatry, Polygamy, or any of the blackest crimes known among Jews, Mohamedans, or Pagans—comparing slaveholders to thieves, &c.—that these things must make difficulty among our people, especially on the border, and weaken the hands of those who have firmly stood by the interests of the Methodist Episcopal Church, and this opinion will be corroborated by each and all of my colleagues on this floor.

My friend, Dr. Hodgson, read from Dr. Elliott's work in regard to the Wesleyan missionaries in the British West Indies. I propose, Mr. President, to call further attention to the same subject, that this Conference may see what line of policy was pursued by the Wesleyan missionaries, under the instruction and direction of Richard Watson, and the wisest and best men in the Wesleyan connection. I hold in my hand the London Missionary Report of 1834, and I read from pages 12 and 13, to show how earnestly our brethren there pursued the great object of their mission, the salvation of the slaves and their masters, and how studiously they avoided everything which might, by possibility, embarrass them in their work, and hinder the accomplishment of their heaven-inspired purposes. I read from Instruction No. 6, as follows:

"As, in the Colonies in which you are called to labor, a great proportion of the inhabitants are in a state of Slavery, the committee most strongly call to your recollection what was so fully stated to you, when you were accepted as a Missionary to the West Indies, that your only business is to promote the moral and religious improvement of the slaves, to whom you may have access, without, in the least degree, in public or private, interfering with their civil condition. On all persons in the state of slaves, you are diligently and explicitly to enforce the same exhortations which the Apostles of our Lord administered to the slaves of ancient nations, where, by their ministry, they embraced christianity: Ephesians 6th chapter, 5th and 8th verses, "Servants be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh," Coloss. 3d chap. 22d and 25th verses, "Servants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh, &c."

Mr. Watson calls the persons addressed "Slaves of ancient nations." I suppose

that his scholarship will hardly be questioned by the learned doctors who have been laboring over the word *Doulos*, (for the last twelve months,) in the connection of that word with the controversy on domestic Slavery.

Instruction 9 is in the words following:

"The Committee caution you against engaging in any of the civil disputes or local politics of the Colony to which you may be appointed, either verbally, or by correspondence with any person at home, or in the Colonies. The whole period of your temporary residence in the West Indies is to be filled up with the proper work of your mission—to be intent upon the solemn work of your office, and upon that eternal state, in the views of which the Committee trust you will ever think and act."

And to show how earnest those wise men were in carrying out the policy they had adopted, I quote a part of Instruction 11, in words following:

"The instructions under this and under the former heads, are to be read over annually at the meeting of every District Committee by the chairman; who is to enquire whether they have been observed on the part of the brethren; and the answer shall be reported in the District Minutes regularly and with them transmitted to the Committee in London. Every Superintendent is not only charged with the observance of them himself, but is responsible, as far as may be, for their observance by the brethren under his direction, or for an immediate report to the District, or to the Managing Committee in London, in any case in which they may have been violated."

This was the method taken by the immediate successors of Mr. Wesley, in the management of this delicate subject. They did not interfere with the "civil condition of the slave," but, following the example of our Lord and his Apostles, they preached the Gospel to masters and slaves—they sowed broadcast the seed of life—"hid the leaven" of truth in the mass of humanity—inaugurated a process of christian civilization, preparatory to the accomplishment of West India emancipation, which was consummated some 70 years after the introduction of Methodism into the Island.

The Act of Emancipation was passed by the British Parliament, and in the fact of the indemnity to the owners, in the sum of one hundred millions of dollars, was entirely unlike anything proposed by those who agitate the subject of immediate emancipation in this country.

And then it is further to be considered that the parties passing the Emancipation Act had between them, and the Islands having slavery, the waters of the broad Atlantic—they were not in immediate contact with three millions of colored population, as are the people of the Southern States of this Union.

What good, I ask, either to master or slave, is to be effected by the adoption of the measure before the Conference? Have we any power to pass Emancipation Acts? Have we millions to indemnify owners?—Congress itself has not the power to liberate a single slave. Has not the highest judicatory of the land decided that Slavery is a State in-

stitution? The measure before us speaks of "mercenary slaveholding"—cannot this Conference perceive that, in an attempt to make non-slaveholding a test of Church membership, the effect would be to induce the mercenary slaveholder to put the price of the slaves in his pocket, and, by that act, tear asunder the ties of husband and wife, parents and children—there might be a change of owners—but such a measure would break no man's chains, and lighten no man's burden—the effect would be evil, and only evil, and that continually. Slavery does not depend upon your action. It is interwoven with civil society, and no action of the Church can affect it in the least, except that which is enjoined by Christ and his Apostles. We have heard a great deal about the law of love. If any one will put his finger on a single passage in the New Testament which teaches in words that the relation of master and slave is a sinful relation, we would like to see it. Mark, I do not say Christianity advocated Slavery, nor do I say Christianity tolerated it, nor did it seek to overthrow it except by the wise and prudent measures ordained by Christ and his Apostles. The Apostles went everywhere throughout the Roman Empire, and sowed broadcast the seeds of truth, expecting that it would spring up, and bring forth fruit. They did not attack the laws, nor seek to overthrow the civil institutions of the Empire. The New Testament contains no particular form of Government. It has left it with the people to enact such a form as they may judge most expedient. Thank God, Christianity flourishes under any Government under which she is allowed to open her mission, whether it be a Despotism, Republicanism, or a pure Democracy. Wherever she has leave to open her mission she goes forth, preaching liberty in the highest sense to the captives, and the opening of the prison doors to those that are bound. Christianity sought not to counteract or undermine, or sap the foundations of the Government, but conformed to the laws of the land. Our blessed Saviour himself was so scrupulous and careful that when he was asked about the tribute money, whether it was lawful to give tribute to Cæsar, he would not answer. He saw the craft of his enemies. Should he answer one way he would be embroiled with the Jews, should he answer another way, he would array himself against the Government. "Show me," said he, "a penny. Whose image and superscription is this?" They answered, "Cæsar's." Render, therefore," said he, "unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's, and unto God the things that are God's." It is well known that the superscription of the king was put upon the coin of the country, and hence the answer.

Christianity is not an apologist for Slavery, and while it publishes no toleration of Slavery, neither does it seek directly to attack it—but in its progress it seeks to counter-work every species of evil. It went forth with one single aim, proclaiming "repentance towards God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ;" and what was the effect? Why

the fact is that in the Roman Empire, in the course of seven hundred years, the power of slavery was broken, and after the lapse of one thousand years, it ceased throughout the Empire. We have been told by Dr. Thompson that "slavery has been in this country three hundred years, and the horrid system has been growing worse and worse." I do not think the Pilgrim fathers brought any slaves to Plymouth rock, and it has not been quite two hundred and fifty years since they landed there. Things are growing worse and worse, are they? Well, we will take a look at this matter. A reference to figures will show that the reverse is the fact, the converse of what Dr. Thompson stated is true.

Dr. Thomson rose here and remarked that his statement referred to the increase of the slave power.

Mr. S. replied—The history of the country will show that he is wrong.

Dr. T. What do you mean by country?

Mr. S. I mean the United States, of course. We have had vivid pictures drawn here representing "the slave power as having its foot upon the neck of freedom and shaking its bloody skeleton hand, threatening to overrun all the States of the Union."

[True! true! here was uttered by several voices.]

Well, we shall see whether it is true or not. I, said Mr. S., do not believe one word of it. But to the facts. In 1789, twelve-thirtieths of all the States had slaves in their borders. If any of you dispute this fact I should like to hear from you. When the controversy came up in relation to the prospective extinction of the slave trade, limiting it to 1808 through a period of twenty consecutive years, Virginia, Delaware, Pennsylvania and New Jersey, voted to terminate the slave trade in 1800, but Connecticut, Massachusetts, and New Hampshire voted with Georgia and South Carolina, and carried the question of the extension of the slave trade to 1808. (Here a voice said, "It was cotton did it.") I guess, replied Mr. S., that you had not got the spinning jennies to work so early as that. I do not blame New England for voting with Georgia and South Carolina in the matter: *they believed* that the formation "of a more perfect union" to provide for the common defence and promote the general welfare," "and to secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity," greatly to be desired. If the States of New England had not met the other States in a spirit of compromise, but had held off, the union could not have been formed. I do not blame her. And I hope that the brother who is so sensitive whenever I refer to New England, will not be disturbed by this statement of the truth, as I am not in any respect answerable for facts of history.

I repeat that twelve-thirtieths of the States held slaves at the adoption of the Federal Constitution.

If reference is had to the debates in the first Congress in 1790, it will be found that upon the presentation of a petition from Benjamin Franklin and others, and also one

from the Friends of Pennsylvania, in relation to the abolition to the slave trade—the answer early given was that Congress had no power to grant the prayer of the petitioners earlier than 1808, and that all that could be done was to embarrass the trade by a *per capita* tax of \$10 on all future imports of slaves.

How do the figures stand in 1790, the year after the Constitution was adopted. By reference to statistics of population of that time, as compared with the statistics of 1850, it will be seen that our friends are not likely to be overwhelmed, and swallowed up with slavery. I will quote the figures as found in "Colton's Atlas of the World;" from this it will be seen that, instead of freedom going backward, six States have become free of the original thirteen, and that in addition, we have the great free States formed from the Northwest Territory out of the soil ceded by Virginia, and the immense Territory on the Pacific.

But how stands the population, the free as compared to the slave, at the two periods named?

Population of the United States in 1790—whites, 3,172,464; free colored, 59,446; slaves, 697,897; or about five whites to one slave, and one free colored to eleven slaves.

In 1850—whites, 19,558,068; free colored, 434,495; slaves, 3,204,313; or about six whites to one slave, and seven slaves to one free colored.

Here you see that free colored people have increased (by emancipation and otherwise) to near half a million, while the disproportion of slaves to the white and free colored population is greatly increased since 1790.

Emancipation has progressed from New England to the line of Delaware, where the slave population is sparse, and slavery exists in its mildest form. The States where emancipation has been effected, did it themselves, without the aid of mischievous intermeddlers who had no jurisdiction over the subject. And but for the rashness and inconsiderate zeal of outside agitators, the progress of emancipation would have been much greater than it has been for the last thirty years.

From the inauguration of *associated abolition action*, at Boston, in 1832, to this hour, but little or less than nothing has been done—the motion has been retrograde—this is true in regard to Kentucky, Maryland, and Virginia. In each of those States, before the period named, the tendency among statesmen and christians was fully and freely to discuss the subject of emancipation, and to indulge hopes of its early accomplishment; but it at length became the fashion to circulate inflammatory publications and exciting pictures through the mails, and to deal in denunciations against Slavery, and even to pronounce the Constitution framed by the wisdom of our fathers to be "a refuge of lies—an agreement with hell, and a covenant with death." The public mind of the slave States became inflamed; and although Kentucky's favorite son put him-

self at the head of the emancipation movement in 1849, in that State, yet his name, though "a tower of strength," was scarcely sufficient to prevent the defeat of a single emancipation candidate for the Convention; and whoever will be at the pains to consult the present laws of Kentucky, will perceive that the whole subject is in a worse condition there than it was a quarter of a century ago. I refer to the Revised Statutes of Kentucky, 1852, page 643 to 648.

Slavery is not, however, destined to be perpetual in this country; a great deal has been done for the colored people of the United States, by the mild, subduing power of the gospel—and he thanked God that he looked forward to the day when freedom should be universal, and christianity will have worked out her legitimate results, and the clank of the last chain shall be heard, and the last groan of oppressed humanity die away. But rashness, denunciation, and violence will accomplish nothing towards bringing about this great consummation.

I will now attend for a moment to those who have rung the changes on the word "extirpation." One of the speakers had treated lightly the Pastoral Address of the General Conference of 1836, in sneering at the manner in which our Church has extirpated Slavery. I am willing to endorse the Pastoral Address—and will read its language from Banks' History of the Methodist Episcopal Church, page 250, vol. 4th—I read as follows from the Pastoral Address of the General Conference, held at Cincinnati in 1836.

"It cannot be unknown to you that the question of slavery in these United States, by the constitutional compact which binds us together as a nation, is left to be regulated by the several State Legislatures themselves, and thereby is put beyond the control of the General Government, as well as that of all ecclesiastical bodies; it being manifest that in the slaveholding States themselves the entire responsibility of its existence, or non-existence, rest with those State Legislatures. Those facts, which are only mentioned here as a reason for the friendly advice which we wish to give you, constrain us as your pastors, who are called to watch over your souls, as those who must give an account, to exhort you to abstain from all abolition movements and associations, and to refrain from patronizing any of their publications, and especially from those of that inflammatory character which denounce, in unmeasured terms, those of their brethren who take the liberty to differ from them. Those of you who may have honest scruples as to the lawfulness of slavery, considered as an abstract principle of moral right and wrong, if you must speak your sentiments, would do much better to express yourselves in those terms of respect and affection which evince a sincere sympathy for those of your brethren who are necessarily, and in some instances reluctantly, associated with slavery in the States where it exists, than to indulge in harsh censures and denunciations, and in those fruitless efforts which, instead

of lightening the burden of the slave, only tend to make his condition the more irksome, and distressing.

"From every view of the subject which we have been able to take, and from the most calm and dispassionate survey of the whole ground, we have come to the solemn conviction that the only safe, scriptural, and prudent way for us, both as ministers and people, to take, is wholly to refrain from this agitating subject, which is now convulsing the country, and consequently the church, from end to end, by calling forth inflammatory speeches, papers and pamphlets.

"While we cheerfully accord to all such all the sincerity they ask for their belief and motives, we cannot but disapprove of their measures, as alike destructive to the peace of the church and to the happiness of the slave himself."

I believe, said Mr. S., that the Pastoral Address is as wise and wholesome in its advice now as in 1836.

That is the doctrine, that Slavery is a State Institution. The Church cannot abolish it, the Congress of the United States cannot free a single slave. Nothing has pained me so much during these debates as the attack on the Fathers of the Church, most of whom were in their graves before those who now arraign their motives and policy were born. Bishop Asbury travelled through summers heat and winters cold, from Maine to Georgia, not as we do in the rail car at the rate of thirty miles an hour, but on horseback, through the paths of the wilderness, from the mountains to the rice plantations of the South. Our learned professors, and presidents of Colleges, shut up in their cloisters, undertake to tell us that they have just as many facilities for forming a sound practical judgment in regard to this perplexing question, as Mr. Asbury had, when he studied the practical workings of the Church in the cane brakes and rice fields. He (Mr. Asbury) was a brave man. He came and stood by our fathers in the storms of the revolutionary war, and while others frightened fled, he stood at his post of danger and duty. He traversed the country, and witnessed the conversion of thousands to God, both free and slaves; and just forty years ago, in 1816, he sank quietly into his grave, in King George's country, Virginia.

"Like some broad river widening towards the sea, Calm and grandly life joined eternity."

Thus, full of years, worn down with toil, the aged veteran of the cross laid him down to rest, and the tears of thousands, white and black, bedewed his grave.

Are we to be told by young men, that this apostle of Methodism "would weep if he were here and witnessed the effects of his policy"—the church, involved as she is, and always has been with slavery? Our fathers had grace enough to go back, when they took a wrong step. It is reported of Bishop Mc Kendree that in administering comfort to an aged brother, who felt that he was pushed aside by some young brilliant preacher, said, "the young men are more eloquent, they

can out preach us and out-vote us, but it is a great thing to have grace to retire with grace." When our fathers found that the provisions of the Christmas Conference could not be carried out, they suspended those provisions for six months, and afterwards indefinitely.

Have I dreamed it, Mr. President? Is it so, that I stand here to defend those worthy men and their policy? If Bishop Asbury, Dr. Coke, Freeborn Garretson, Joshua Wells, Rozal and Pickering, must have their acts and policy called in question, let it be done by gray hairs, and not by young men who had not gotten out of their nurses arms when Bishop Asbury went to his reward. This aggressive spirit has no respect for age or experience.

The time was when Bishop Asbury could come down from the chair and offer a motion, and advocate it, too. We have, sir, a moderate Episcopacy. It is, I think, getting quite moderate, and more so every year. The Bishops now cannot even make a modest suggestion that the General Conference had not a constitutional right to make a new test of membership, but they must be boarded and charged with "pre-judging the question." And we not only hear of a disposition to over-ride the constitution, but we hear talk of "dissolving Conferences, such as the Missouri, Arkansas, and Kentucky," because, forsooth, it costs money to sustain these Conferences. We have yet to learn that the souls of men are to be estimated by dollars and cents. It is alleged that they have had but a small increase. If you will look at the general minutes you will find that two Conferences north of Mason's and Dixon's line, on a basis of 31,000 members, show a less increase of members than these poor Conferences do upon a basis of only 10,000 members. The Baltimore alone contributes annually to the Missionary Society near \$30,000, while there is allowed her for domestic missions the pitiful sum of \$2,250.

We who are on the border are a very unfortunate class of persons—not acceptable to extremists on either hand. On the one hand we are held to be Abolitionists, and on the other charged with being pro-slavery. We stand, sir, where our fathers stood, upon the platform of the Constitution and the Discipline, and we think we are right, exactly right.

I once advised an arbitration between two church members to settle a controversy about property. The arbitration was conducted as the Discipline directs, and when the award was rendered it displeased both parties. I informed them that I was fully satisfied that the arbitrators had done exact justice; inasmuch as neither of them liked the award, I should see that they complied, or were excluded from the Church, according to the provisions of the Discipline. They did comply and there was an end to the controversy.

This is just our case, we cannot please the extremists of the South, and we cannot please our brethren East, North, and N. West.

In this condition if we should be driven to

the wall, the injury and wrong must be upon those who have forced it upon us.

If our brethren will let us alone, and they want some outlet for their philanthropy, I would respectfully suggest to them to correct the social evils at their own doors; this they can do legitimately, without disturbing the peace of the Church, or putting at hazard the integrity of the Union.

I know, Mr. President, that human nature is a "busy institution," and our brethren who will be doing something had better turn their attention to ameliorate the condition of the free colored population, and to the abolition of the Black Laws upon the statute books of the free States.

I wonder, sir, how much interest our Ohio brethren take in wiping from the statute books of that State, the disgraceful statutes in relation to free blacks, which have only been expunged, as it were, yesterday.

And I should like to class lead our zealous Indiana brethren, to ascertain how many of them voted for the exclusion of colored free men from that State, when the clause of exclusion in the constitution received a majority of over 100,000 votes.

Here Dr. McClintock asked Mr. S. if he meant that the abolition of the black laws was to be effected by the Conference?

By no means, said Mr. S., that is not the place; I mean at the ballot-box, in their capacity as citizens. Conferences have nothing to do with State laws, and I have only named the matter here in order to show our aggressive brethren that they have work enough at home if they will do it, without troubling us about an evil which we have no power to correct.

He was not done yet. He would ask his brethren from Vermont what they had done with their laws for whipping strangers who would return to the State after being ordered out by the overseers of the poor.

Here a brother from Vermont said he did not know of any such law.

Mr. S. replied, you may not know of it, and I hope it has been abolished, but it was on the statute in 1808—laws of Vermont, 1808, vol. 1, page 384 and 402.

Mr. S. said—instead of exercising so much vicarious repentance about other men's sins within the slave States, he would exhort brethren to exercise patience and faith in those who have the management of our Church interest there. He was afraid sometimes that these brethren did not think any of us a bit better than we ought to be. If they think, however, that they can manage better than we have done, (and will satisfy the Bishops of that,) I hope they will be allowed to put their policy in operation on the border, by receiving transfers to our places.

Men, Mr. President, who find fault with the policy of Mr. Asbury and his successors, in the management of the question of Slavery, ought to know that, shut up within the walls of a college, or placed hundreds of miles from the localities of "the great evil," they have no more chance to form a sound practical judgment about the wise management of the

question than Mr. *Adams* would have had to learn "experimental Chemistry" in the field of a cotton farm, or a rice plantation.

The great success of Methodism in the United States, which is without a parallel on the face of the earth, is demonstrative of the wisdom of our conservative policy—rapidly as our population has increased in this God-favored land, our Church in this whole country (including the North and South) has increased more rapidly than the population. I have a table prepared with great care by an intelligent gentleman of our Church, which, for want of time, I will not detain the Conference by reading it. It shows an average increase of population by decades, from 1790 to 1850, of 34.44 cents per cent. And an average increase of Methodism, from 1790 to 1851, of 69.42 cents per cent., being more than double—this includes simply the members of the Church North, South, East, and West, and not the millions of those who attend the ministry of our Church, but are not members.

Now, sir, shall we forsake our policy, which has demonstrated its utility and wisdom, and listen to adventurers, and enter upon the trial of questionable plans, and adopt the theories of visionaries? I hope not, sir; If we should, we may present an example of the case of the man, whose epitaph was in these words: "*I was well, would be better, took physic, and here I lie.*" We have heard in this debate, that the patient is sick, and the brethren insist on being allowed "to do something, if it is ever so little"—just "something to show they have made progress, even a step." "Progress," that is the word. We do not believe, sir, that the Methodist Episcopal Church is "a sick man;" we cannot consent to have our ecclesiastical Doctors try their hands in giving either Allopathic or Homeopathic doses to this healthy and athletic giant, nor can we consent that our Sampson shall be shorn of his strength, by having abolition withes bound upon his limbs.

We have had in this country an illustration of the effect of attempting to benefit the colored people, free and slaves, by making non-slaveholding a test of church membership in the case of that exemplary people known as "The Friends," or Quakers. In 1766, some of them had purchased imported slaves, and despite the efforts of the society, there were some who held slaves in Pennsylvania and New Jersey, as late as 1776 to 1781. I quote from a publication of theirs made in Philadelphia in 1843, called, "*A brief statement of the rise and progress of the testimony of the Religious Society of Friends against Slavery and the slave trade.*" Pages 21, 24, 29, 31, 34, 35.

They had been early in the slave States, as early as 1696, more than fifty years before a single Methodist came to these shores, even before Mr. Wesley was born: but putting themselves upon the ultra platform now sought to be introduced here, they have melted away in the slave States as snow before the midday sun. It will be said, I know that their want of success has been owing to other causes, mainly: unsoundness

in doctrine, &c. We have yet to learn that Batekley, Penn. and the "orthodox Friends," are less sound in doctrine than we are, and that they are persons of great excellence of character; all fully admit. But what have they done for either the slaves or free colored population of the United States?

We have heard of "outside pressure," and we are told that "the sentiment of the church is not up to the public sentiment of the country." I doubt not, sir, that there are many in the country, who would like to push our church forward to rash and injurious measures knowing that they would find their own advantage in placing our church in a false position. Our course is that of the Apostles, and Fathers of our church, and we cannot come down to meet the demands of the "outside pressure."

If it were possible to pass the measure now before us—you might make a "sectional church,"—you might *chase and weaken the bonds of the Union*, but no good could be achieved for the master or the slave, and no advance step taken for emancipation.

I have been looking into the General Minutes, sir, to see what influence the Conferences have in the free States over the colored population of the country, and to my surprise I find that in all those Conferences they have less than 900 colored members in the Church, while the Conferences having slave territory, in whole or in part, have an aggregate of 29,000 colored members, in addition to 172,000 colored members in the church South. Where have all the free colored people strayed to? Have they lost confidence in the "progressive" brethren? I once heard the Rev. Joseph Cartwright, (a talented and excellent colored preacher,) say that he had always found that those colored congregations that were under the charge of a white elder, were better instructed, and more regular and exemplary, than those otherwise provided for.

Our brethren may possibly have an account to settle in this quarter, which may not be so easy of adjustment.

In conclusion, Mr. President, who asks for this change of Discipline? Who of our 790,000 church members asked it? Have one in ten or one in fifty asked for it? How many have petitioned this General Conference? I thought the committee on Slavery were to report the number, but they have not. Upon examination it will be found that the Conferences whose delegates ask a change, even if they all were to speak, (which they do not, even one in ten,) they are a minority of more than 40,000, as compared with the Conferences whose delegates ask for no change.

The people which he in part represented ask for no change—all they ask is peace and quiet, and to be let alone. They have and love the Discipline, and in the sight and fear of God, they will do the best they can to fulfil, for the bond and free, the great mission of Methodism, "to spread Scriptural holiness all over these lands."

Mr. Slicer closed, thanking the Conference profoundly for the patience with which they had listened to his remarks.